

A diverse group ranging in size from the Shining Cuckoo to the Channel-billed Cuckoo. Generally grey or brown, often with conspicuous barring, especially on the underparts; long tail with transverse bars and white notches; short bill and short legs. Sexes alike. Most lay 1 egg in nests of other insectivorous species. Young cuckoos make insistent penetrating begging calls. The adults are vocal when breeding and are more often heard than seen.

ORIENTAL CUCKOO *Cuculus saturatus*

Rare Asian straggler

33 cm. Like large Pallid Cuckoo but darker grey, and lower chest, belly and undertail boldly barred black on white. Rare brown phase rich brown above, paler below and heavily barred black all over. Feeds by swooping to ground from a perch. Usually silent in NZ. **Habitat:** Breeds Asia. Migrates to Indonesia and Australia. A few reach NZ, mainly in lightly forested open country. [Sp 268]



CUCKOOS

Cuculidae

About 120 species worldwide; 2 breed in New Zealand and 4 are vagrants.

nest, or simply dominates the smaller chicks and they starve to death. Young cuckoos make persistent, high-pitched begging calls even after leaving the nest, and this stimulates its foster parents and other birds of the same or different species to feed it, thus causing confusion about the true identity of the foster parents.

Most cuckoos are parasitic, laying their eggs in nests of other insectivorous bird species and then letting the host rear the young, fledging often well after it is capable of flying well. Cuckoos lay their eggs while the host's clutch is being formed, or a day or two after completion of that clutch. The cuckoo removes one of the host's eggs and replaces it with its own. The cuckoo egg develops very rapidly and usually hatches first. The cuckoo chick then ejects all other eggs and chicks from the

Cuckoos are strong fliers, and most migrate between temperate and tropical regions. During the breeding season, they are conspicuously vocal, but at other times they remain silent and cryptic.

268. ORIENTAL CUCKOO *Cuculus saturatus*

Plate 62

Size: 33 cm, 100 g
Distribution: Breeds in central and eastern Asia from the Himalayas and Siberia to Japan, parasitising nests of warblers and flycatchers. In September, they migrate south to winter from southern India eastwards to the Philippines, New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and northern and eastern Australia. A few birds straggle to New Zealand, with a total of about 25 records from the Far North to The Snares, in October–April.

Behaviour: Oriental Cuckoos are usually seen in open areas with trees, such in willows along riverbanks, trees around farmhouses, or near a forest edge. They typically perch on a branch or post and make repeated forays to catch insects and earthworms from the ground nearby. They are generally silent in New Zealand, but a bird on Little Barrier Island uttered a quiet, regular 'tsoo-tsoo-tsoo' about a dozen times at 1 second intervals.